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Author(s): Ruth Hodkinson

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Ruth Hodgkinson

What are University of Chester Staff perceptions of the role
of Chester Students' Union in relation to the student
experience at Chester?

Supervisor: Paul Webb

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Abstract

Research suggests that Students' Unions (SU) role has changed over the years. Historically, SUs were viewed as political and debating organisations and then moving far more towards extracurricular and commercial areas. This attracted negative press and has resulted in the work of SUs not always being portrayed as positive or professional. Research suggests there has recently been a shift by SUs to re-establish their core role of representation. This is due to a number of factors including, National Students Survey (NSS) and National Union of Students (NUS)/Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) initiatives encouraging far more emphasis on student experience whilst working in partnership with their Universities to ensure the student voice is heard through their SUs.

This research has undertaken a qualitative approach, using semi structured interviews with 8 University of Chester staff (UoC) staff to gauge university staff perceptions of the role of Chester Students' Union (CSU) and how this contributes to student experience.

Findings from these interviews suggested staff were aware of the role of a SU and the core role of representation. However when questioned about the existing working partnership with CSU their knowledge was fragmented and relied on professional/personal experiences rather than overall awareness. Commercial and social aspects of the role of CSU were far more apparent. The role of representation was noted as being ineffective.

If SUs are only being observed by their universities for their social activities rather than a professional partner within student experience this could have negative results for funding and functions of SUs in future.

Recommendations have been made to address issues of effective engagement of students, representation and partnership working with the university. This will be addressed with an implementation plan presented at strategic planning meetings.

Declaration

As the 'owner ' of the research and the dissertation you must assert its originality - in other words you must declare the work as original and that you have not submitted it for any other academic purpose. Similarly you must declare that the work is yours and that all references to previous work - either by yourself or other authors - are fully referenced.

The following statement, signed and dated, **MUST** appear at the appropriate place in your dissertation:

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to Research

CSU is independent from University of Chester (UoC) although it receives some of its funding from the University, which is awarded annually.

CSU employs full and part-time staff members managed by a General Manager and Deputy General Manager. CSU comprises membership services and commercial services. The commercial services provide two shops, a coffee shop and bar, and offers additional financial support for membership services. Membership services consist of approximately 80 sports clubs and societies, welfare and accommodation advice, and student representation. Overall, there is representation on university committees, board of governors, university audits and staff/student liaison representation. It also includes individual representation on academic appeals, complaints, disciplinaries, professional suitability panels, academic malpractice.

CSU is student led with elections held annually to elect a President and two Vice Presidents (Sabbatical Officers). The elected Sabbatical Officers are newly graduated students who have been elected into this position by the student body of UoC. They represent the student body on any issue which affects students. The Charities Act (1994) states that student representation is the fundamental role of SU and feeds into the student experience. Carey (2011) notes the importance of the role of representation. Managers and staff team within SU support the Sabbatical Officers in their roles whilst also ensuring sound business decisions and helping to direct the organisation

CSU is affiliated to the National Union of Students (NUS) who support and guide individual SU's. NUS provide the national voice for students and they lobby Government on student-related issues and Government policies as reported on their website <http://www.nus.org.uk>. They work closely with other higher education organisations to enhance student experience (www.nusconnect.org.uk). The following research will explore whether or not national initiatives for SUs to work in partnership with their universities are being recognised at a local level and whether or not SU is working in isolation as reported by Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (2012) or if the "Shop Window" (Coakly 2011) effect, where only commercial elements and social activities, are still being observed while the fundamental role of SU and if vital role of representation, within SE is being overlooked. (Greatrix 2012, 15th March)

1.2 Research Question and Aims

Title of the dissertation:

What are University of Chester Staff perceptions of the role of Chester Students' Union in relation to the student experience at Chester?

Aim(s) of the research:

- To ascertain from a sample of University staff their existing knowledge of the role of CSU
- To explore existing links, partnership and collaborative working with a sample of University Staff and CSU.
- To investigate the University staff perceptions of the "student experience".
- To research University Staff awareness of the role CSU plays in the "student experience."
- To inform CSU Strategic Development through recommendations ascertained through staff perceptions and awareness of the role of CSU and relevant literature

1.3 Justification for Research

The policy of enhancing student experience (SE) has been driven by National Student Survey (NSS) (<http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>) which emphasises the role of SU, both individually and also whilst working in partnership with their Universities, in enhancing SE. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is another driving force behind collaborative working of SUs and their universities to enhance SE with papers such as "The Student Experience Research 2012" (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk>) a paper jointly published by QAA and NUS highlighting the need for this work.

The Education Act 1994 states the core role of SU is the representation of its members. NUS and QAA see this representative role being fundamental in development work undertaken with SUs and universities in the area of SE and student engagement. This is also highlighted in QAA Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B5: Student Engagement (June 2012). The Higher Education Academy report "Supporting Students' Unions and Institutions to engage with students" (2012) also indicates the need for SUs and universities work in partnership.

Recent negative press from national newspapers (Guardian, Daily Mail and Times Higher) have reported on student behaviour, linking this to SUs which could encourage a negative public image and perception of SUs. There have also been articles by newspapers and NUS reporting lack of awareness of the role of SU, apathy from students within the SU election process and lack of awareness of services. Coakley (2012), writing in the monthly NUS publication Connect, described a “Student Union Shop Window” effect where people are only aware of shops, bars and social events of SU and not any of their other roles.

The aim of this research is to ascertain UoC staff perceptions of CSU to determine the level of awareness of CSU functions and how this contributes to the working partnership with university within SE.

The research will endeavour to identify university staff levels of awareness of CSU role and any gaps in knowledge in order that these issues can be addressed in the recommendations section for CSU Strategic Development.

1.4 Methodology

Research will use a qualitative approach as this assists with understanding an individual’s perceptions of the area of work (Bell 2010). An appraisal of the current literature identified research into student and public perceptions of SUs; however there is no apparent research investigating the perceptions of university staff regarding SUs. The study will lean towards an ethnographical approach, a study into the organisation’s culture (Page, 2012). The perceived image or culture of CSU could possibly impact upon the findings and future developments of the organisation.

Data gathered through the literature review will establish a theoretical framework to devise questions and prompts to be used with the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Data will be analysed, thematically, through themes and categories initially informed through literature whilst being inducted through emerging themes during interviews for analysis. Evaluation will note levels of awareness and staff perceptions whilst identifying any gaps in awareness or knowledge. Conclusions will be drawn from findings and evaluation which will inform development of recommendations which will in turn inform further strategic development for CSU and any further study.

1.5 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One – Introduction presents a brief overview of the aims, objectives of the research and an outline of methodology adopted.

Chapter Two – Literature Review explores literature the areas of the role of SU. There areas include: existing perceptions, student awareness, apathy amongst student voters in SU elections, students not engaging with SU, working in partnership with the university, student experience, and representation. Also how the image and perceptions of SU role may impact on strategic direction. The literature review has introduced a framework to form themes and categories to conduct further research.

Chapter Three – Methodology discusses the qualitative approach to the research and the research instrument of four questions. A set of thematic prompts in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were developed to ascertain staff perceptions.

Chapter Four – Findings presents the thematic data from interviews in the form of questions, responses and charts.

Chapter Five – Analysis/Conclusions Evaluation of data will be discussed, conclusions drawn from these findings whilst relating back to the literature review.

Chapter Six – Recommendations will be made for future developments and further study in this area. This will include an implementation plan.

1.6 Abbreviations and Definitions

Table One: Abbreviations/Definitions Table	
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CSU	Chester Students' Union
CUC	Committee of University Chairs
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institute
NSS	National Student Survey
NSSO	National Student Services Organisation
NUS	National Union of Students
NUSUK	National Union of Students, United Kingdom
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SE	Student Experience
SSG	Student Support and Guidance
SU	Students' Union
SUIE	Students' Union Evaluation Initiative
UoC	University of Chester
Definitions	
NSS	National Student Survey – a survey of all final year undergraduate students on issues regarding SE. Conducted annually, it is the only national measure of the student experience. Findings are reported and

	published in national league tables.
SSG	Student Support and Guidance. UoC support department dealing with Welfare, Disability, International Welfare, Complaints, Disciplinaries, Volunteering and Student Safety.
Staff/Student Liaison	UoC process run jointly by SSG and CSU. Students representative attend termly meetings with staff from their academic departments to discuss issues related to their study or other issues which may affect their SE at UoC. Minutes and findings are returned to SSG and CSU who work in partnership to resolve any issues.

1.7 Summary

This chapter provides a brief overview of the research including background information, aims and objectives and contextualises reasons for this study. It noted some key areas of existing research and determined the methodology for further qualitative research. It reports how findings will be analysed thematically and evaluated. Conclusions will be drawn and recommendations for further developments and study will be made.

The following chapter will examine key literature and research which has helped to form this study. A conceptual model will be included to assist as a visual representation of the research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Denscombe (1998) suggests “a literature review demonstrates to the researcher what work is already available” (p. 158), enabling the researcher to identify key research completed and develop new research questions where gaps exist in current literature.

This overview of existing literature explores current perceptions of British SUs and examines how these SU roles are being developed. It explores how SUs are portrayed in national press and awareness of SU functions found across universities and the student body. Research into how SUs work in partnership with their Universities to contribute towards SE is reviewed. Relevant NUS research will be used to consider how their national work directly affects SUs.

Further research will explore how UoC staff perceives the role of CSU and how this contributes to partnership working with UoC in relation to SE.

Internal documents such as UoC and CSU committee papers and collaborative training documents are used to determine the current role of CSU within UoC as there are no published papers.

2.2 The Role of a Students' Union

Mike Day, Director of Nations at NUSUK, reports SUs date back to 1892 when University of Liverpool Students' Guild was established to provide “opportunities for social activity and representing student views to University” (Day, 2012b, p. 11). Farrington and Palfreyman (2006) confirm SUs were first formed for social and sporting activities. NUS was founded in 1922 to “enable international links to achieve greater understanding between students” (Day, 2012b, p. 13). In the 1960s and 70s, SUs became far more political, having aligned themselves with Trade Unions and having become involved with political struggles. (Day, 2012b & Farrington and Palfreyman 2006). Significant changes took place during the 1980s when the government discouraged SU political activities and encouraged universities “to do something to curb SU activities or legislation would follow” (Day, 2012b, p.75). Further changes occurred in the 1980s with development of the commercial side of SUs when NUS alongside NSSO arranged the purchase of large quantities of alcohol to sell off to SU bars at a reduced rate (Day, 2012). The loss of political direction and the growth of the commercial side of SUs, in particular alcohol, could be seen as the turning point for SUs and the emergence of the drinking image held to this day. The Education Act 1994 defines the role of SUs to be representative of its

members although not allowing SUs to become engaged with political activities not directly associated with students. The Act states SU is "an association of the generality of students at an establishment whose principal purposes include promoting the general interests of its members".

Coakly (2011) notes that although the core role of representation was clearly stated in the 1994 Education Act the literature suggests SUs are still seen far more for their commercial side.

However, the role of representation was increased with the introduction of NSS in 2005 (http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/your_voice.html) which encourages students to have a voice. This is being nationally driven by QAA and NUS to involve SUs in the role of representing this voice. Data from the NSS is published in league tables determining the overall SE a student can expect at their institution. Universities note the importance of this NSS survey for recruitment, retention and reputation.

NUS (2012b) describe the SUs role "promotes, defends and extends the rights of students" and the role of NUS is to support individual SUs to achieve this. The majority of SU websites define their core role as representation and through this representation they feed into the overall SE.

UoC website quotes CSU "exists to represent and support students at University of Chester" (<http://www.chester.ac.uk>). CSU states its mission is to "enhance the student experience" and to "strive to deliver high quality union services". (<http://www.chestersu.com>).

2.2.1 Existing perceptions

There have been a large number of press releases regarding negative behaviour of students which have been linked to SUs. NUS notes SUs have received bad press in the past, (Day, 2012a p.41) stated "journalists report any kind of demonstrative activism in a negative way". Many newspaper reports have highlighted the negative behaviour of students in recent 'Top-up Fee Demonstrations'. Lewis, Vasager, Williams and Taylor (2010, November 10) reported in the Guardian Newspaper that the London "protest of 2010 organised by NUS erupted into violence".

The BBC also reported violence during protests clearly linking protesters' behaviour to NUS noting "153 people were arrested" (Coughan, 2010, December 1). Although there have been more recent peaceful student demonstrations press releases still refer to demonstrations of 2010 and continuously highlight the violence and negative behaviour as illustrated in the article by Owen (2012, November 21).

SU sports teams organise annual inter-university sporting tournaments where they travel abroad to compete, this is known as going on tour. Negative press reports follow bad behaviour of students on tour. Stock (2010, April 3) writing for the Daily Mail reporting from Salou in Spain quotes “how many arrests? Amazingly, there’s been only one: he was a member of a ‘cricket’ team — and president of a university union — who, apparently, head-butted a Spanish police officer and spent the night in a cell”.

Negative press is also linked to SU sports teams conducting initiation ceremonies. Sutton (2008, October 2) reported for the BBC News that initiation ceremonies were “frightening and degrading” and this resulted from “heavy drinking”, whilst Alleyne (2009, February 6) reported for the Daily Telegraph these cases “usually involve excessive amounts of alcohol”. Earl, Martin, McCarthy and Soule (2004) argue newspapers are not the most reliable source of information stating selective bias is displayed by newspapers when reporting on events such as demonstrations and protests as they focus purely on newsworthiness and report on “acts of violence or the intensity of the event.” The influence of the press and images presented of SUs can affect perceptions held by the general public on the role of SUs.

There is positive press but examples of these are far less frequent. Warnes (2012, August 6) reports in a very brief article for the Independent “joining a club or society when you go to university is highly recommended”. Done and Mulvey (2012) promotes benefits of belonging to a club and society having researched the transferable skills gained from being a member of a Club or Society and note employability skills gained.

The positive articles do not hold the same level of readership of national press where public perceptions can be formed.

2.2.2 Student awareness

Negative press can be damning for SU if they want to be considered as a professional partner by their University. Additionally, research suggests students themselves are not always aware of the functions of SU. Many students perceive the visual or high profile side of SU, usually clubs and societies, bars, shops and social events resulting in heavy drinking. Coakly (2011) reports the ‘Shop Window’ effect when students “will only see a SU for its organisation of Freshers’ Week and bars and will remain unaware of the core functions of representation”. Swain (2011) supports this notion stating “the services side of most unions – bars, shops, night clubs – tend massively to outweigh the representation

side of a SU amongst students” echoing back to the account of the growth of the commercial side of SUs in 1980’s (Day, 2012b).

Sanderson (2012, March 21), reporting in the Guardian, notes perception of SUs as being “merely symbolic of student representation, and have little influence on decisions affecting the student body”. Garrison (2012) highlights concerns that even students engaged with social activities provided by SU “feel excluded from their SU and never engage with the democratic processes that make SUs truly unique and important for students’ lives”. These democratic processes allow students to elect their representatives encouraging students to have a voice within their SE. SU elections take place annually to elect student officers whose roles are to represent. However, apathy amongst students voting in SU elections appears to be common place and a factor in lack of awareness of the functions of SU.

2.2.3 Apathy amongst voters

Porter (2011, June 16) noted SUs report, as few as 12%, of their students’ vote in annual officer elections. The CSU general manager revealed CSU turn out rate was approximately 11% in February, 2013 CSU Elections, compared to the turnout rate in the last General Election in 2010 of 65.1% (<http://www.ukpolitical.info/2010.htm>). London Metropolitan SU survey of student participation in their SU elections in 2012 found “lack of awareness” of the functions of SU was a major contributing factor for low turnout in elections (Rowley, 2012). A NUS survey of SUs regarding the SU Election Process reported this apathy but also quoted a response “Having the chance to vote for who I would like to represent my voice is extremely important and Union elections should be an integral part of SE” Hallett and Garrison (2013 pg. 15). This would infer if students are aware of the role of a SU and engage in the democratic process of elections they see the benefits to the student body and the importance of the role of representation. This would present the message to University that SUs represent a large proportion of the student body not just the 11% reported at Chester at present.

NUS recognised lack of engagement within their report entitled “Surfing the Wave: A Strategic Response to A Wave of Change” (2009) which emphasised the need for students to engage with their SUs noting “student representation is vital but the challenge is steep”. They add “Unions are still often perceived as alcohol-driven buildings. Representation is treated as a process and is often resourced poorly” (NUS, 2009).

Negative press and lack of awareness of the role of a SU amongst students may not place SUs in a powerful position in convincing Universities they are the voice of students when working in partnership with their University to enhance SE.

2.3 Working in Partnership with the University

Working in partnership is described by Stuart and Marinez (2005) as a ‘social pact’ or an ‘explicit agreement’ where referring to Trade Unions and organisations in their research. Trade Unions have a similar role to SUs in representing their members whilst working with University.

QAA “UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality Chapter B5: Student engagement” (2012) note partnership should be “based on values of openness; trust and honesty agreed; shared goals and values and a regular communication between partners”.

NSS (<http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>) is one of the driving forces behind Universities and SUs working in partnership to enhance SE. The importance of this partnership working is recognised by Trawler & Trawler (2010) report for HEA on student engagement and in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2011 report “Higher education: students at the heart of the system”.

NUS (2012a) recognised partnership working within their own Governance by developing a relationship agreement which endeavours to determine the partnership working between SUs and universities. They note these relationship agreements should “inform strategic direction of both parties through service agreements” and support “shared commitment to developing and improving students’ experience of academia and extra-curricular aspects of their lives”. HEFCE have also written a guide entitled “Developing good practice in SUs governance and relationships with parent Institutions guide” (HEFCE, 2008).

There is a clear message about the importance of partnership but this is not always heard by individual SUs. The Students’ Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI) (2012) noted in the past SUs have worked in an “insular way” however they are now encouraging SUs to “tell universities what they are offering” in connection with SE. This supports QAA “UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: (2012) where they note honest and open communication required by SUs and universities when working towards shared goal of enhancing SE.

Greatrix (2012, March 15) reported “working with, not against” highlights the “shift” being made by SUs to work with their University and suggests NSS played a major factor in this shift.

The shift to work in partnership with universities is taking place at UoC where they already work in partnership with CSU. Sabbatical Officers are members of every committee (Appendix One) and the President is part of the University’s Governing Body. University staff members and CSU worked closely together to re-design Staff/Student Liaison system (Appendix Two), and CSU represents students on appeals, disciplinarys, professional suitability cases, academic malpractice and complaints cases (Appendix Three). CSU works with the University’s Quality Standards Department to ensure they play an active role within the overall SE. Interviews with staff will determine if this representative role of the student body is being recognised as a role CSU performs and if this enhancing SE.

2.3.1 Student Experience

Enhancing SE is featured in both UoC and CSU Mission Statements. NUS and the HEA worked together to develop SE in their NUS/HEA Student Engagement Toolkit (<http://www.nusconnect.otg/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/toolkit/>). Barrow (2011, October 31) reporting in the Guardian stated NUS suggests SUs “should play a starring role in student engagement”. Research now appears to suggest SUs are being recognised as having a “key role to play in enhancing the student experience” as cited in the Higher Education Governing Bodies Supplementary (2009). This is supported by 1994 Group (2007) policy report “Enhancing the Student Experience” noting SUs and NUS are at “the heart of partnership working.” This highlights the importance of the function of SU being recognised by their university.

The phrase ‘student experience’ is used in many reports without definition or clarity. NUS and QAA have explored areas of SE and have conducted surveys to ascertain areas of concern for students in specific areas within SE. Dobinson (2012) reporting on live chat ‘Working with SUs to boost student experience’ noted QAA invested £218,000 in collaborative projects with NUS to research into SE. NUS and QAA report “The Student Experience Research” (2012) highlights a number of teaching and learning areas which may affect SE. They also noted areas such as finance; employability and post-graduate study as being areas affecting SE.

NSS has also been a key indicator and quality feedback system to enable the enhancement of SE. NUS note on their website

(<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/nss/>) that NSS helps to gauge student opinions, identifies good practice and areas in need of improvement which will support SUs on a local and national level to support their students.

The introduction of NSS may assist SUs enabling them to re-define their role offsetting negative press and the “shop window effect” back to a more representative role.

2.3.2 Student Representation

Defining the role of SU as a student voice through representation had been evident throughout this section as Carey (2011) notes “student representation has been part of the British higher education landscape for many years and academics have relied on representatives to access the student voice.” However, the QAA 2005 report “Outcomes from institutional audit student representation and feedback arrangements” quotes universities themselves rather than SUs were developing representation feedback mechanisms and not recognising their SU in this role. It was noted although SU officers were able to represent students on “key or appropriate committees” most universities were still opposed to SU officers sitting on Senior Management Committees.

However, Brennen and Williams (2004) note many institutions work alongside their SUs to provide training and support for course representatives. They acknowledge the role of representation can “provide a direct student input into decision-making, provide a student view about the ‘future, provide communication two-way”.

This again raises questions as to whether or not universities are recognising or valuing the representative role of SU.

2.4 Perceptions of role impacting on strategic direction

The role or image of any organisation is crucial when working in partnership with other stakeholders and partners. Market Street Research (2004) state negative press can have a damaging effect on a business and can raise concerns for partners. As discussed earlier in the literature review SUs have received a great deal of negative press over recent years.

The literature review also noted there is a need for SUs to work in partnership with their institutions. Mullett (2001) and QAA (2012) both note working in partnership requires clear communication, honesty, openness and a view of shared goals.

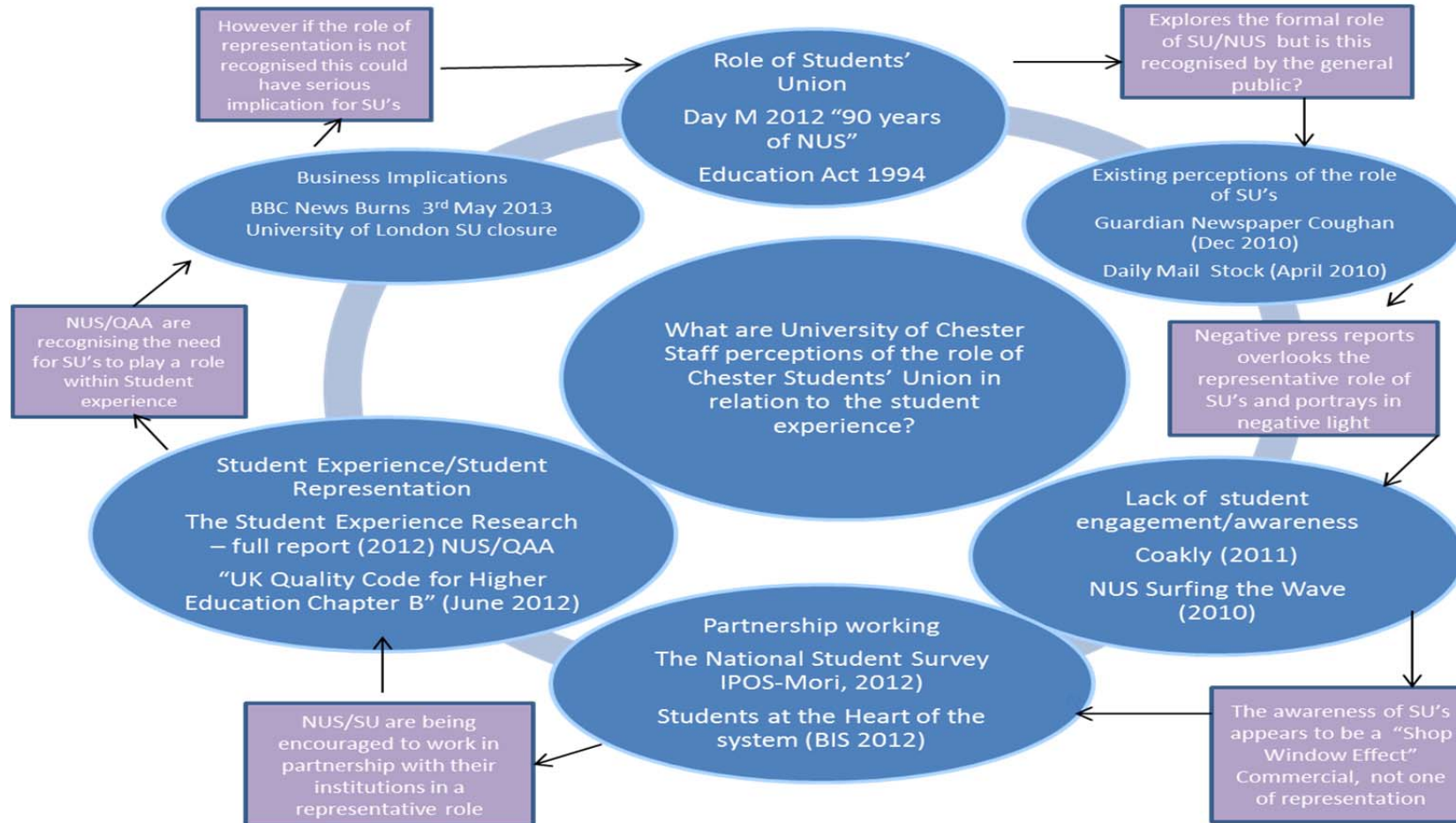
Recent research has highlighted how vulnerable SU's can be if they are only perceived for social activities and not valued as an independent representative of students. Burns (2013, 3rd May) reports on the closure of University of London Union. Their University is to stop funding their SU and instead moving roles of student support and representation within university-run services. The SU will only run social activities.

This research will endeavour to ascertain UoC Staff perceptions of the role of CSU. Findings of this research will inform existing perceptions and awareness of CSU's role or image. It will determine how CSU develops and communicates its strategic mission, vision and image to UoC in a professional partnership role. It will also identify CSU's present position, gaps in knowledge and inform future strategic development.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has been designed to highlight key areas of literature within this piece of research. At the initial stage the role of SU is defined by Education Act 1994 and Day(2012) where the core role of representation was noted. The following stage was to look at existing perceptions of SU to ascertain if the role of representation was being recognised. Press releases portray SUs in a negative light and lack of engagement by students or limited awareness of SU functions as described by Coakly (2012) as the "shop window" effect questioned the effectiveness of the SU's core role. National initiatives and drivers, NSS and IBIS paper (2012) "students at the heart of the system" are encouraging SUs to work in partnership with their universities within SE as noted in papers by NUS/QAA "the Student Experience Research – full report (2012). Although national initiatives are being funded to explore this partnership working research is required to see if this is being recognised on a local level. The final stage of the report highlighted in the closure of University of London SU where the university themselves are taking over the roles performed by SU apart from the social elements, highlighting how vulnerable SUs can be if they are not recognised for their representative role. The following conceptual map demonstrates framework for the literature review and the research project by linking key areas together.

Figure 1: Conceptual Map for Literature Review



2.6 Summary

Initially, NUS and SUs determined their main function as one of social and creating international links. Eventually SUs moved into a political role in 1960's and 1970's. However, in 1980's and 1990's, through legislation, their role changed from a political focus and concentrated more on commercial elements whilst the core role of representation was not high on the agenda. Recently, through the introduction of NSS and partnership working between NUS and QAA there has been a significant shift for SUs to reclaim their representation role and to be seen as a professional working partner by their Universities working in collaboration to enhance SE.

However, are these national initiatives being interpreted at a local level and are university staff aware of this shift? Is the term 'student experience' understood by both partners? If the role of SU is to inform their universities of their role within SE then CSU will have to be clear within its strategic planning process how this is interpreted and impacts on business delivery.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter will detail the methodology adopted to undertake this piece of research to ensure that the research objectives are addressed.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The aim of the research is to ascertain University staff perceptions and will justify the qualitative approach to be the most appropriate methodology to adopt for this research project. Bell (2010) notes a “qualitative perspective is appropriate when the researcher is concerned to understand the individuals’ perceptions of their world”. Qualitative research is “associated with words as the unit of analysis rather than numbers” (Denscombe, 2011, p.174) making it ideally suited for interview based research of staff perceptions and their interpretation of the role of SU. Maykut and Morehouse (1995) promote use of qualitative methods for interpretive research allowing the researcher to use conversations and interviews.

As deputy General Manager of CSU the use of listening skills to ascertain a person’s perception and interpretation of events is essential and these skills lend themselves to this interpretative and qualitative approach to current research. Maykut and Morehouse (1995) also note it is essential in qualitative research to have an “empathic understanding or the ability to reproduce in one’s own mind the feeling, motives and thoughts behind the action of others” (p. 81). Again this is useful in ascertaining perceptions and understanding interviewee’s viewpoint.

3.3 Research Strategy

3.3.1 Justification for the selected paradigm and methodology

Appraisal of current literature notes negative perceptions and lack of awareness of SU’s role, therefore an ethnographical approach to the research may determine whether this behaviour is perceived as a cultural issue for SUs as “ethnographic research focuses on culture” Page (2012, pg 334). However, Bower (as cited by Bell, 2010) notes ethnographic study is a “study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields”(p.14). Ethnographical methods can be time-consuming and recommends they are not to be undertaken by an inexperienced researcher Biggam (2011). This research will demonstrate

elements of an ethnographical approach through semi-structured interviews rather than making use of more time consuming methods of observations and fieldwork.

3.3.2 Rejected Methods

When exploring potential qualitative research method Grounded Theory Approach was also considered. Grounded Theory Approach is recommended for inductive research by Elliott and Higgins (Dec 2012) as “a means of generating new theory and new understandings, and requires researchers to identify the research problem from research participants’ perspectives” and was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. This approach allows the researcher to explore new ideas with interviewees before a literature review has been undertaken resulting in an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach as undertaken in more traditional qualitative research (Elliott and Higgins Dec 2012). Denscombe (2011) suggests that as this approach does not start from a theoretical framework it could be appropriate in a field where very little research exists and appears suitable for this piece of research. However, Bell (2012) notes grounded theory can be complex and requires the researcher to “identify codes, concepts and categories” (p. 18). With further consideration to time constraints and noted complexities of this approach, grounded theory was dismissed as not being the most appropriate research method to adopt.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Design of Instruments

With consideration to time-scale and as mentioned earlier a personal skill of empathetic listening and understanding it was deemed the appropriate approach to data collection would be using a partial ethnographical approach making use of qualitative face-to-face interview methods to collect data. Face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to build a rapport with interviewees, encouraging interviewees to share rich information whilst being able to divulge experiences and perceptions. (DiCicco-Bloom 2006)

A questionnaire was constructed as the research instrument. This was established by using four questions which were taken directly from the research question. Firstly to establish current staff perceptions of the role of SUs secondly to ascertain staff perceptions of CSU’s current partnership workings with CSU. The following two questions would then explore the perceptions of SE and CSU’s role within this. (Appendix Four)

A purposive sample technique will be used in collecting data from academic staff, academic support staff and senior managers at UoC. Purposive sampling is when the “judgement of the researcher is used to select the sample” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007, (p 230). The sample was selected to gather perceptions from staff at different levels of responsibility within University and included staff from main campus, Warrington campus, and Kingsway and Riverside sites to ascertain the level of awareness of CSU across University. The sample size of 8 interviews was considered to be appropriate when time and financial constraints were factored in for a convenience sample (Biggam, 2011). Black (2011) notes convenience sampling allows the researcher to select interviewees who “are readily available and willing to participate” (p.231). As the researcher, and a member of staff who has worked at university for many years, it seemed appropriate to adopt this approach. It will ensure a cross-section of staff are selected from an established accessible network and fit the geographical criteria stated above and who are able to provide “in-depth and qualitative insight” suggested by Biggam (2011). It was therefore decided 8 members of staff would be interviewed, this allowed sufficient time available to allow in-depth discussions to take place.

DiCicco-Brown and Crabtree (2006) promote the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews to allow the interviewer to delve deeply and explore and record more detailed answers. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) recommend the use of these open-ended questions to encourage in-depth answers to be collected. Additional probing prompts were used to encourage open discussion and ensure perceptions have been fully explored. These additional probing prompts were included in the set of questions. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) note probing is a useful tool in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Bell (2010) cautions while face-to-face semi-structured interviews can help gather quality information they can also be time-consuming.

3.5 Research Procedures

As mentioned earlier, data will be gathered through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews whilst referring to a set of four predetermined and open-ended questions taken directly from the aims of the study.

Interviews will last for the scheduled half an hour to one hour as recommended by DiCicco-Brown and Crabtree (2006) as an optimum timescale. All interviewees were informed of the timescale before agreeing to be interviewed. This timescale allowed for use of prompts and although the questions were not leading, encouragement was given and

reminders were provided to interviewees to help them re-cap what has already been discussed. Use of prompts and reminders allow interviewees to re-focus on issues they may have already raised. Prompts also ensure the researcher does not forget what areas need to be covered. This encourages freedom of conversation whilst allowing for structure and order for questioning (Morse and Field 2002)). Interviewees were contacted using e-mail to request interviews at a time and location convenient to themselves. For interviewees who work in an open or public office an alternative room was allocated (quiet room within the CSU). The location of an interview is important; “somewhere without disruptions, quiet and private is essential and comfortable chairs at an angle where eye contact can be made but not over bearing or confrontational” (Denscombe 2001). Interviewees were asked prior to interviews whether they were happy to be interviewed in the SU room or if they would be more comfortable in their own office or choice of room, alternative arrangements could be made if this is not the case.

Interviewees were informed interviews were confidential and data recorded in the report would not allow them to be identified as recommended by Bell (2010). Permission was sought from participants to disclose which group of staff they belonged to i.e. academic or support staff as this information would be needed to support findings in determining level of awareness from each group. Interviewees were asked for permission to record interviews before the session. Tape-recording interviews ensures a level of accuracy at a later date in the research process. As part of the preparation process tape-recorders were tested and additional batteries were taken into the interview room as back-up for any technical failures. (DiCirro-Bloom 2006)

Interviewees were deliberately not briefed or made aware of interview questions prior to interviews to ensure their perceptions were fresh and current and research prior to interviews had not been undertaken. Wengraf (2001) notes by giving too much information to interviewees before interviews may encourage them to have too many preconceived ideas about the piece of research before the interview. Wengraf (2001 cites Foddy pg 189) by reporting “potential interviewees are going to encode whatever you say and put into a “frame” in terms of which they will understand in the following interview event” concerns are that the wrong framing could occur which would hinder interview responses. A full explanation and introduction was given directly before interviews took place.

Data analysis will be thematic. The Foundation for Qualitative Research in Education cited Boyatzis, R.E. (1998) by quoting “Thematic analysis in its simplest form is a

categorizing strategy for qualitative data” (pg 5). Themes and categories were drawn from semi-structured interviews and related to theory discussed in the literature review. Analysis used a deductive approach recommended by Wallman (2010) to allow for emergent themes and patterns to develop from the research. Questions set a framework; Teal (2007) refers to a framework as template analysis this allows themes and codes to be incorporated manually into a template to demonstrate an organised approach to capturing data. Teal (2007) also encourages use of priori coding which is coding which has already been established before analysis takes place. Use of prompts and probes throughout interviews will act as priori coding for this piece of research. Coding used in initial stages, when analysing transcripts from interviews, will allow for errors to be made in the early stages be re-defined at a later stage to clearly ascertain emerging themes as suggested by Denscombe (2001). Buzele (2009) suggests when analysing and writing up qualitative thematic data this should not purely be descriptive; noting “Describe, compare, relate is a simple three step formula.” (pg 12) Describing ensures putting data into context and allows background to data to be explored. Comparing data assists when looking at patterns and frequency of reported themes and relating encourages the researcher to scrutinise themes further to ascertain conditions which may affect the responses. Certain conditions in this piece of research, which may be taken into account for example, could be that interviewees working on different sites may have a different perspective.

3.6 Research Ethics

Consent for interviews was sought from individual interviewees during initial stages of contact, through email requests. During interviews each interviewee was asked if they agreed to being recorded and positive responses were gained. Page (p.348) that interviewees are normally happy with interviews being recorded as long as they are aware the recorder can be turned off on request. This was the case in one of the interviews when the interviewee received a confidential telephone call. Interviewees were only identified by staff category, Senior Management, Academic Staff or Support Staff and when an interviewee was located on sites other than main campus reference was given to this, when appropriate to findings.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity and Reliability in research helps to justify the trustworthiness, rigour and credibility to the research.

More credibility has previously been given to Quantitative research and there are more scientific measures in place to prove data and analysis however, measures can be incorporated within Qualitative data. A thematic approach has been adopted for this piece of research. During semi-structured interviews themes were addressed in the questions asked and by prompts used to offer a repetitive and consistent form of investigation throughout all interviews. During analysis rigour, validity and reliability has been established by visiting and re-visiting data to ensure themes are correctly identified. Roberts, Priest and Traynor (July 18, 2006)

3.8 Summary

Data gathered from face-to-face, semi structured interviews have allowed in-depth and rich information to be collected. Open-ended questions and a list of prompts encouraged themes to emerge from interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed which has given a framework for coding and analysis of data whilst this data can be re-visited to ensure accuracy of themes and give validity to the piece of research.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

As a qualitative study the narrative gained from interviews was informative and findings will endeavour to capture data through actual responses. Each question used prompts to encourage themes although many themes emerged through discussion. These have been represented in charts.

The charts are a guide using a numerical summary of the amount of prompts required to assess the level of awareness:

Table Two : Awareness Levels
0 = no mention of theme
1 = 4 prompts
2 = 3 prompts
3 = 2 prompts
5 = no prompts required and fully aware of themes

Through discussion the level of awareness was more apparent in certain areas than others. As noted in the methodology chapter staff were taken from a cross section of University. The table below explains and highlights the categories from which the staff belong and corresponds with the charts.

Table Three: Abbreviations for charts and staff categories			
	Abbreviations	Staff Category	Location
Interviewee 1	In1	Support Staff	Warrington Campus
Interviewee 2	In2	Academic Staff	Chester (main campus)
Interviewee 3	In3	Senior Manager	Chester (main campus)
Interviewee 4	In4	Academic Staff	Riverside
Interviewee 5	In5	Senior Manager	Chester (main campus)
Interviewee 6	In6	Support Staff	Kingsway
Interviewee 7	In7	Support Staff	Chester (main campus)
Interviewee 8	In8	Support Staff	Chester (main campus)

These responses will be included in the summary at the end of this chapter and will be discussed further in analysis, conclusions and recommendations chapters.

4.2 Analysis of respondents

The research question is “What are the University of Chester staff perceptions of the role of CSU within the student experience”.

4.2.1. Question One: “What do you know about the role of a Students’ Union?” was asked to determine the level of awareness amongst interviewees of the role of SU. At this point responses appeared to be in connection with interviewee’s perceptions of the general roles of SUs rather than specifically CSU.

Responses to question one are analysed in charts One and Two.

Themes emerging in Chart One include:

- Commercial/social - included, shop, bar, entertainment and social events
- Individual representation - representation on academic appeals, academic malpractice, professional suitability panels, complaints/disciplinaries.
- Representation - committee membership or representation when SU represents the student body.
- Student Experience included any reference made to SE.

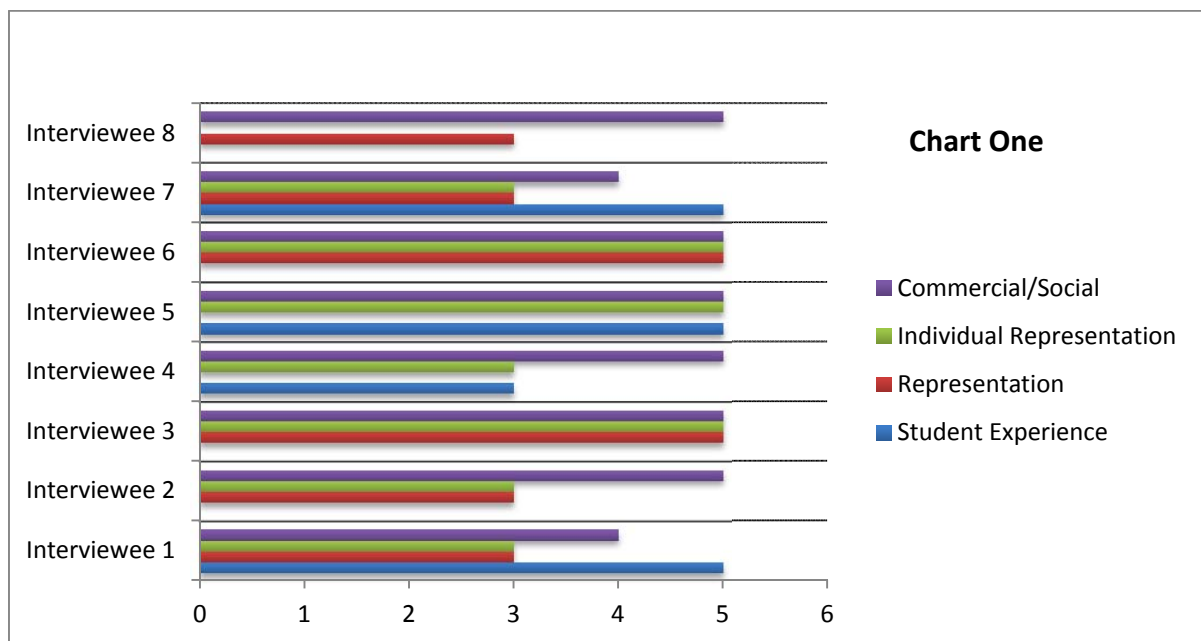


Chart One Responses

Commercial and Social

8 out of 8 interviewees were aware of social or commercial aspects of SU. Only 3 of these mentioned commercial through shops, Starbucks and selling hoodies. All 8 noted the social side

of SU. In2 quoted “entertainment is the core of SU” In3 noted “at least 50% of their (SU) role is seen by students as social and sporting and the most interaction students have with SU are along those lines” In4 noted the SU role is there to think about their (students) social life”. In5 quoted “the bar is regarded as a standard SU activity” In6 quoted “most people think SU is a party animal” In7 and In8 were also very aware of the bar and social activities.
Individual Representation
7 out of 8 interviewees were aware of individual representation.
In1 responded “you possibly deal with disciplinaries relating to clubs and societies” although not formal panels. ” In2 was aware of academic and malpractice hearings. In3 noted SU deal with appeals (interviewee sits on numerous panels) In4 is involved with SU on disciplinary panels from a personal experience with a student and noted they saw this as the wider role of SU. In6 noted “if a student has a problems SU is where you go”
Representation
6 out of 8 interviewees were aware of representation.
In1 was aware of Warrington Committee membership (Warrington Staff). In2 noted “SU act as a body to represent students” adding SU “almost act as a Trade Union”. In5 quoted the Education Act (1994) in terms of SU representation “SU should have a higher profile in co-ordinating this function” adding “this is the lowest profile and in many cases the function would still probably be performed even without the involvement of SU”. In6 quoted “It’s in the name it’s a SU (In6 is a shop steward and aware of the role of a union) In7 and In8 were aware of committee membership.
Student Experience
4 out of 8 interviewees mentioned student experience.
In1 quoted “They (SU) look at making SE better”. In7 noted “SU is very much part of SE” however In4 noted students on Riverside Campus (based Riverside) “are not getting the full SE (this was related to the social element of SU)

Additional emerging themes summarised in Chart Two included:

- Clubs and Societies
- Volunteering
- Welfare/Safety – general welfare issues and finance
- SU Structure/ NUS - SU Officers, independent organisation, or general structure of SU and mention of NUS.

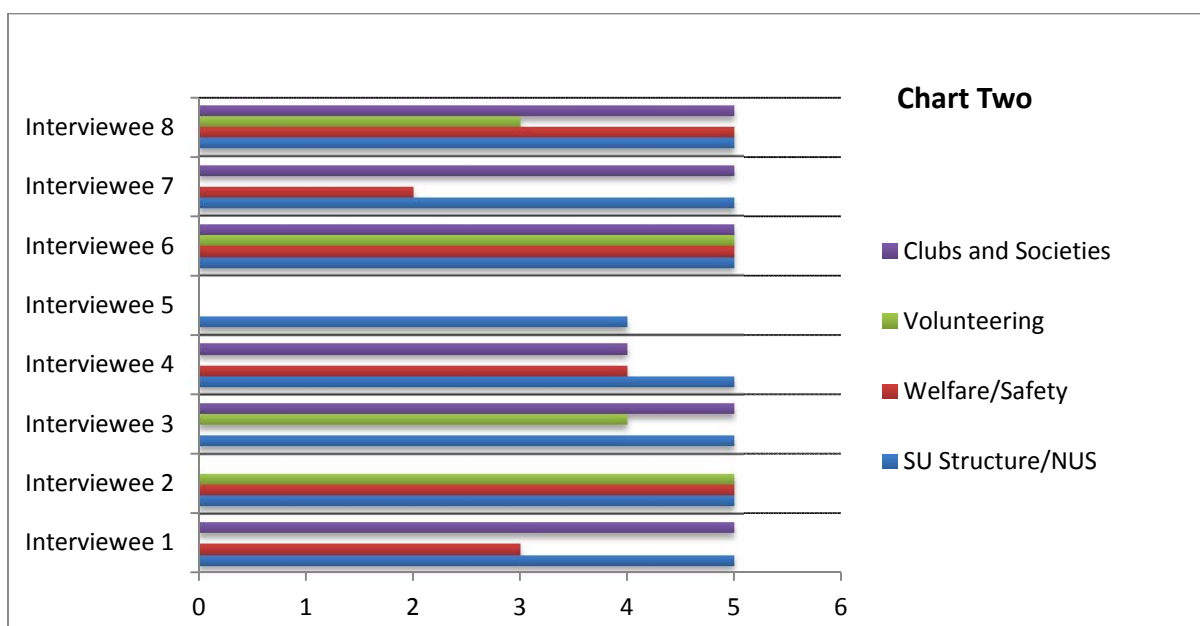


Chart Two Responses

Clubs and Societies
6 out of the 8 interviewees were aware of Clubs and Societies and out of these 6 interviewees.
In1 noted “there are teams on a Wednesday afternoon I presume that’s all run by SU”. In3 saw SU as “the gatekeeper or organiser of Clubs and Societies”. In4 noted one of the only roles of SU was “a body that supported them (students) to settle into University by providing opportunities to join societies and groups” In6 was aware of SU Clubs and Societies . In7 was aware of Clubs and Societies and saw this as an important role of SU. In8 quoted SU “is where the all the Clubs and Societies are”
Volunteering
4 out of the 8 interviewees were aware of the volunteering role of SU
In3 was aware of induction week volunteers however noted this was only “to help with social events and clubs and societies”. In8 quoted that “induction week volunteers I suppose they come under SU”
Welfare/Safety
6 out of 8 of the interviewees were aware of the welfare/safety role of SU.
In2 awareness of SU student welfare was from a personal aspect noting “one of my friends was a finance officer (relating to their own university experience) I know SU help with that” In3 was aware of referring students with debt issues and personal issues to SU or SSG. In4 noted SU dealt with student welfare but quoted “this is on a very superficial level”
SU officers/SU Structure/NUS
8 out of 8 interviewees were aware of SU officers and SU Structure although 3 out of 8 were aware of NUS

In2 noted “NUS is a body to represent students at a national level in government and on student policy. In4 noted they knew SU has officers although did not know who they were. In5 noted “NUS were seen as political 40 or 50 years ago, then came back again with fee demo’s” and of SU Officers. In6 noted using NUS literature in their own study NUS. In7 and In8 were aware SU is independent from University and SU officers.

4.2.2 Question Two: How does the University and Students’ Union work in Partnership? was asked to ascertain the level of awareness regarding existing partnership working between UoC and CSU.

Emerging themes summarised in Chart Three included:

- Representation - (defined earlier)
- Individual Representation - (defined earlier)
- Staff/Student Liaison – definition in abbreviations and definition table
- Departmental Referrals
- SU Structure/NUS (defined earlier)

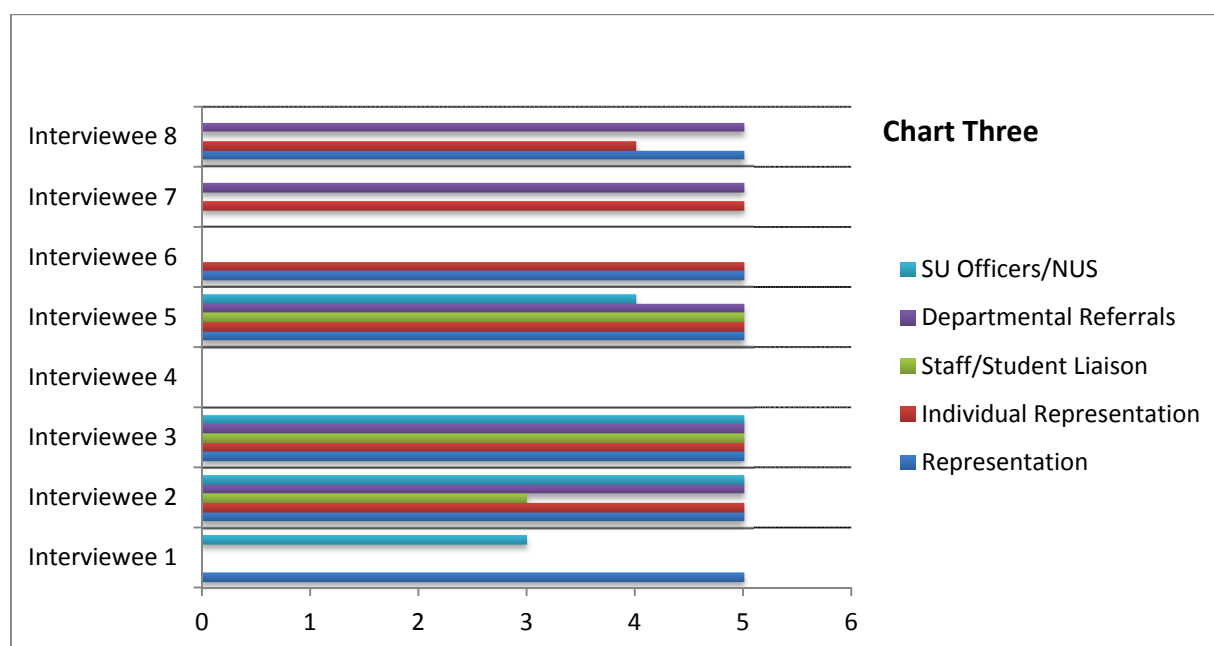


Chart Three Responses

SU Officers/Structure and links with NUS

2 out of 8 interviewees were aware of SU Officers/SU and a further 2 interviewees were aware of NUS partnership working

In2 and In5 recognised SU Officers working in partnership with Senior Management.

In1 noted “you probably have a partnership with NUS, they organised the protest march about student fees” In3 was aware of the relationship between NUS, HEFCE and QAA and the national agenda to work in partnership although noted “I’m not sure they (QAA and HEFCE) articulate themselves very well on how they want this role with SUs to work”
Departmental Referrals
3 interviewees were aware of departmental referrals
In3 noted although “SU thinks it works in partnership with departments”. In5 noted there was partnership working with SU in with their department. In2, In7 and In8 noted students were referred from their departments and referred from SU.
Staff/Student Liaison
5 out of 8 interviewees were aware of staff/student liaison formal process.
In2, In4 and In5 were aware of staff/student liaison process but not aware SU had anything to do with this. In5 added “staff/student liaison was just “a label”. In3 and In5 were not sure how many departments were aware that the minutes and findings of staff/student liaison meetings should go through to SU.
Individual Representation
6 out of 8 interviewees were aware of partnership working with SU and UoC through individual representation.
In2 had dealt with SU on appeals however noted “it is a one-way process and there is no feedback from SU”. In3 was aware of SU being involved in academic malpractice hearing and disciplinarys quoted “there is a partnership there which is good”. In4, In7 and In8 all noted areas in which they had been involved with SU as academic appeals and malpractice. In8 noted partnership with University was close quoting “I imagine that there are a lot of people who don’t actually realise that SU is independent from University”
Representation
6 out of 8 interviewees were aware of representation, all quoted committee membership as the main area of representation
In2 was aware of committee membership noting students were on validation panels but did not see the connection to SU. In3 was aware of QAA national agenda to involve SUs in partnership working in particular, the learning process and noted “QAA believe there should be a complete partnership, I’m not sure students themselves would agree with that, although SU may well think they have a role in that”. In5 noted committee representation “allowed students a voice at all levels” although expressed concerns whether this voice was “sufficiently student friendly or focused, to achieve the best outcomes for the students”, In8 added concerns regarding the effectiveness of students on committees.

4.2.3 Question Three: What is your understanding of the “Student Experience”? This question was asked to explore interviewees’ general understanding of SE.

Emerging themes summarised in Chart Four included:

- Facilities/Accommodation/Catering - catering relating to facility issues i.e. buildings, car parks, and transport. Accommodation related to accommodation issues and catering issues
- Academic/Placements - relating to teaching and learning, study or academic issues. Placements issues relating to academic placements.
- Social/Friends and Social Networks - bar, entertainment, social events, friends and networking.
- NSS - National Student Survey.
- Student life/ holistic – includes reference to every element of the student life and their experience of university.

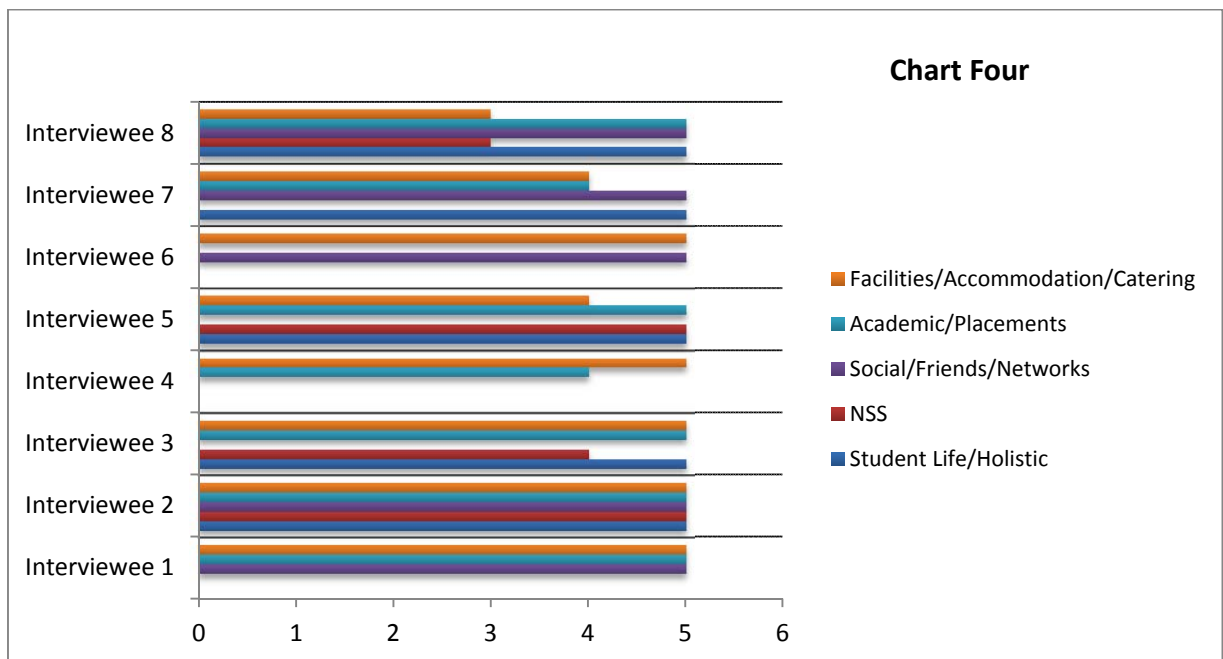


Chart Four Responses

Facilities/Accommodation/Catering

8/8 noted facilities, accommodation and catering was fundamental to SE

In2 noted “it’s every member of staff including, cleaning, accommodation, catering were all part of the experience” “it’s every meal they get, all of it very tiny little thing that makes up the 3, 4, 5, years”.

Academic and placements
7 recognised academic being part of SE 1 out of 8 noted placements were part of this.
In3 noted “students must have confidence in what they are being taught and university must have responsibility for the quality of that”. In8 noted study was an important part of SE although “it’s not just about their study”. In2 was fully aware of learning being part of SE however was also concerned about placements and noted “a lot of things are out of University’s control whilst they (students) are on placement”.
Social/friends/networks
4/8 interviewees noted social groups and friendship groups is an important part of SE
In1 quoted “it’s making sure they are happy and not becoming isolated”. In7 noted social networks through clubs and societies as very important. In8 remarked on the importance of friendship groups “you see them (student) walking around on their own in freshers’ week, someone comes in and says they’ve found a friend and you think thank goodness” In6 mentioned SU being a party animal again “It’s not all partying – people don’t realise – but that’s the image”.
NSS/Feedback
4/8 noted the NSS played a role in SE
In2 was aware of NSS but wondered how helpful it was and quoted “the questions are a bit vague, loaded and are a bit ambiguous, it’s not clear exactly what they are trying to get at” and noted SE is immeasurable as you are “talking about a million different things”. In5 also noted the words” SE has become almost a code and not always a helpful term although NSS had tried to break it down”.
Student Life Cycle/holistic
5/8 noted SE was the student’s overall experience at University.
In2 quoted it’s “from the moment they get here until the moment they leave”. In8 noted SE was the responsibility of the whole university although added “our department is the forefront of SE” 3 interviewees noted every SE was different. In2 and In5 noted SE is immeasurable

Further themes included campus isolation mentioned by an interviewee based at Riverside reporting Riverside did not get the same SE as those based on main campus due to isolation.

4.2.4 Question Four: What role does the Students’ Union have to play in the “Student Experience”? After interviewees had considered the areas of SE this question was asked to discover their perceptions of the role CSU plays in SE. Themes for question four are highlighted in Charts Five and Six.

Emerging themes summarised in Chart Five included:

- Student voice/independent – a representative voice of students. Noted SU as independent from University.
- Social/Friends/Networks - defined earlier.
- Individual Representation – defined earlier.
- Representation - defined earlier

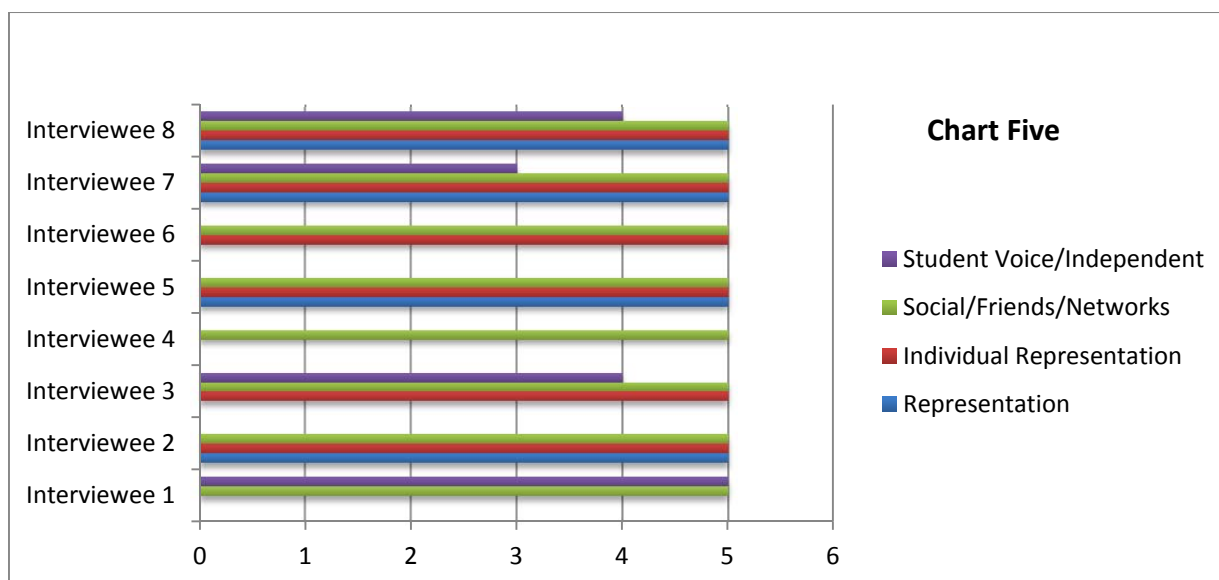


Chart Five Responses

Student Voice/Independent
2/8 interviewees quoted “student voice” as playing a role within SE and linking this with SU. 5/8 noted SU are a separate organisation from University
In1 noted the role of SU was to provide the student voice. In5 agreed with this however noted “student voice is heard through many different committees but whether or not it was sufficiently student friendly due to lack of engagement with SU”. 5 interviewees noted benefits of SU being independent from University and this being part of SE. In6 noted “students are more likely to speak to SU than SSG as they (President/Vice President) have been there, seen it and done it”. In8 noted “you want SU to be an independent body” and thinks this gives SU “more clout” when students need representing.
Social/Networks
8/8 interviewees noted the social element of University plays an important part of SE and all linked SU within this role.
In3 quoted “SU is very good at asserting themselves in the social area”. In4 was aware of the social side of SU but noted campus isolation made it difficult for their students to participate. In7

noted “if you stopped someone in the street and mentioned SU the first thing they would think would be the bar. I don’t think you’ll get away from that image” however In7 indicated for students this was positive if they were away from home for the first time “it’s where they would meet people and it is what is expected of SU”. In8 supported this by saying “ You will always struggle with the argument that SU = beer that’s what students expect –university do the serious stuff and SU do fun stuff”.
Individual Representation
3/8 interviewees were aware of SU role within individual representation.
All 3 were aware of the role of SU within academic appeals or malpractice area.
Representation
6/8 mentioned representation.
In2 noted SU plays a role in university policy and management. In3 remarked SU “has the ear of the Vice Chancellor and thinks that SU has a unique opportunity to influence change – if they choose to us it”. In5 noted SU should be more involved with co-ordination of representation networks however noted lack of participation by students in SU would affect this. In8 quoted “you represent students that’s the whole idea”.

Further emerging themes summarised in Chart Six included:

- Clubs and Societies – defined earlier
- Campus isolation – defined earlier
- Facilities/Accommodation/Community – defined earlier
- Volunteering/Employability – any mention of these areas
- Academic/Placements – defined earlier

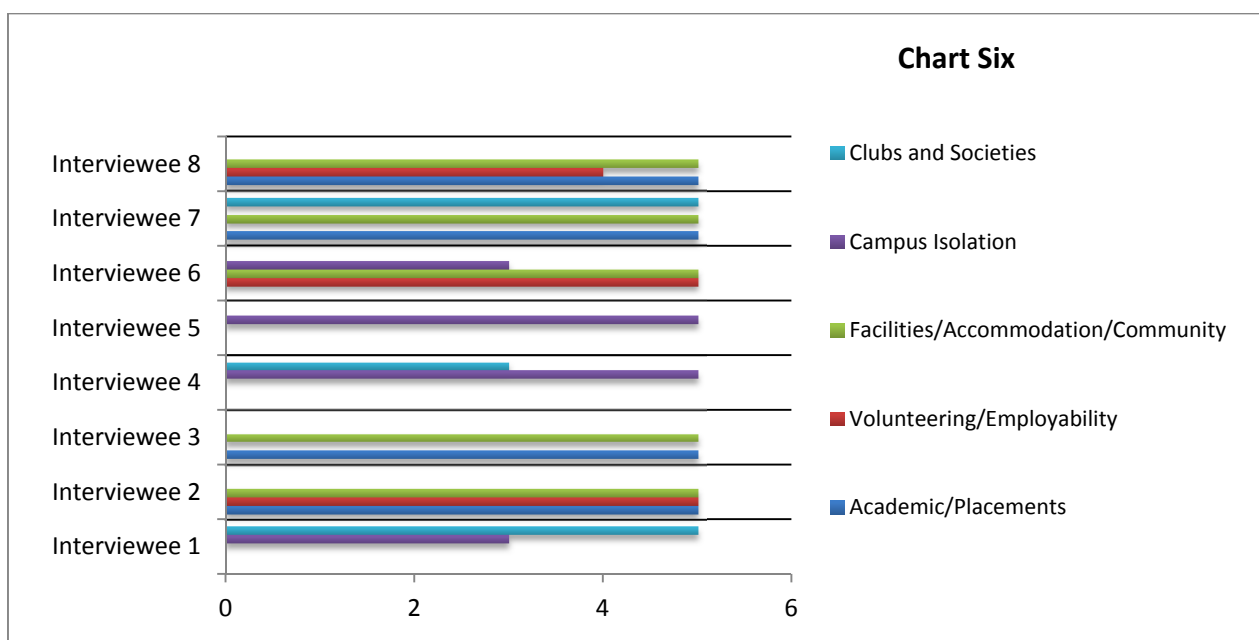


Chart Six Responses

Clubs and Societies
3/8 noted SU clubs and societies play a role within SE however only In1 and In7 noted the importance of this role.
Campus Isolation
Only 3/8 interviewees are not working on main campus. In1, In4 and In6 all noted campus isolation played a part in SE and the role CSU plays.
In4 (Riverside) noted “I don’t think SU do anything for us” whilst In6 (Kingsway) was concerned about the safety and transport issues surrounding campus isolation, however In6 noted SU have a role to play in supporting these students and highlighting issues to University.
Facilities/Accommodation/Community
5/8 interviewees were aware of SU involvement with Facilities/Accommodation/Community
In2 noted SU gets involved with resident associations in the local community and In7 and In8 were aware of work SU does with local landlords and accommodation. In6 was very aware of the role of SU within facilities and ensuring students have what they need i.e. common room at Kingsway.
Volunteering/Employability
Only 3/8 noted volunteering and employability being linked to SU.
In6 noted SU play a role within volunteering “I read about volunteering in the local paper anyone here will automatically read it” this was linked to SU. In2 noted “Volunteering and employability are areas in which SU could play a key role” but seemed unaware of any existing role of SU.
Academic/placements

5/8 noted teaching and learning and academic within SE. However, there was some confusion as to whether or not SU was involved the existing processes involving student representation and In3 noted “SU should be gaining students’ opinions in areas of teaching and learning” indicating that they were not.

4.4 Summary

All data was collected through semi-structured interviews and responses will be used in the following chapter when analysing qualitative data gathered.

Conclusions will be drawn from this analysis and recommendations made.

5 Analysis and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will evaluate data and draw conclusions from the research. All interviewees were asked the same four questions and prompts were used to assist in responses. In the previous chapter, charts and responses were logged in table format to ascertain level of awareness for each of the common themes emerging from questions. A cross section of staff were interviewed and their category has been identified in responses.

5.2 Critical evaluation of adopted methodology

As Bell (2010) noted, a qualitative approach to research should be adopted when “the researcher is concerned about the individual’s perception of the world”. This was appropriate for this piece of research as interviewees’ perceptions needed to be gained as very little research was available regarding perceptions of SUs. Methodology also incorporated an ethnographic approach which was cited by Page (2012, pg 334) as being “research focuses on culture”. The perceived culture of SUs became more apparent throughout the research as many quotes were related to the social aspects of SUs and this being perceived as the main function of SU, supported by Swain (2011), an image that would be difficult to move away from.

The sample size for this piece of research was eight interviewees. Biggam (2011) noted time and financial constraints should be considered when factoring in the number of interviews. Although interviews were not particularly time consuming the time required for transcription and analysis was lengthier than first anticipated and a smaller sample size may have been more manageable for this project. Semi-structured interviews encouraged active communication. DiCicco-Bloom (2006) support this by noting that face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to build rapport with interviewees and to share rich data. This was the case and all respondents appeared enthusiastic about the area of research. Bell (2010) notes face-to-face semi structured interviews can be time consuming; however, interviews were conducted within the half an hour to one hour time scale recommended by DiCicco-Brown and Crabtree (2006). The enthusiasm and interest of the interviewees meant that it proved a challenge at times to follow the pre-determined questions and prompts and to ensure data collected was relevant to the area of study. Analysis was time consuming due to the volume of data collected and incorporating this into a framework for data as recommended by Teal (2007). However, richness and quality of data collected was

highly beneficial to the research project and additional time had been factored in to allow for unexpected time slippages.

5.3 Analysis/Conclusions about the research questions and aims

Question One: What do you know about the role of a Students' Union?

Recent initiatives by NUS and QAA are driving partnership working between SUs and Universities to enhance SE and evidenced by HEA (2013). It was noted in the literature review that the role of SU may be unclear due to developments in SUs have taken place over the years as described by Day (2012) and perceptions arising from negative press. This question was asked therefore, to explore interviewees' perceptions of SU.

It was noted that some interviewees related what they saw the role of SU in general rather than indicating specifically the role of CSU.

Chart one highlighted the themes of Commercial and Social, Individual Representation, Representation and Student Experience

All were aware of commercial/social side of SU (2 support staff required prompting). Interviewees noted this as the main function of SU. A senior manager quoted "entertainment was seen as the core of SU" whilst 1 support staff quoted "most people think that SU is a party animal". All interviewees were aware of representation. . All were aware of individual representation although both senior managers and 1 support staff (shop steward) had a greater awareness. 1 senior manager mentioned SE. 2 support staff mentioned SE and 1 academic staff (after prompting).

Chart two included themes of clubs and societies, volunteering welfare and safety, SU Structure and NUS.

Apart from 2 interviewees (1 academic, 1 senior manager) all recognised the role of clubs and societies. There were differing awareness levels regarding specific roles such as volunteering and welfare/safety and no specific category of staff appeared to have more awareness than others. All interviewees were aware of the structure of SU. Both senior managers recognised links with NUS and current national initiatives towards partnership working and SE.

Conclusions from Question One

This first question was asked to determine staff perceptions of the role of SU. The literature review referred to national press releases of Sus and sought to determine if staff perceptions reflected current perceptions portrayed by the press (examples of press releases were highlighted in Chapter Two). There was only one staff member who referred to press releases and this was in a positive quote about volunteering in local press. National press appears not to have influenced staff regarding these negative perceptions. Coakly (2011) stated many SUs are only seen for their “shop window effect”, their high profile functions such as clubs and societies, bars, shops and socials and not recognised for their role of representation as cited in the Education Act 1994 as “being a SU’s core function”. All were aware of social/commercial side of SU and saw this as the main function of SU which support the report by Coakly (2011) and Swain (2011). However, all interviewees were aware of representation and individual representation. However, 1 interviewee noted the role of representation would happen anyway even without the involvement of CSU which highlights the concerns expressed by Burns (2013, 3rd May) who reported on the closure of London University SU.

Question Two: How do the University and Students’ Union work in partnership?

Partnership working has been recognised in BIS 2011 report “Students at the heart of the system” highlighting the role of SUs and Universities in enhancing SE. Question two was used to determine how staff perceive CSU and UoC working in partnership to determine if these national initiatives are being interpreted at a local level.

Many of the themes were very similar to question one.

Chart three highlighted themes of SU Officers and links with NUS, Departmental Referrals, staff/student liaison, individual representation and representation.

7 of the 8 interviewees were aware of representation or individual representation. Both senior managers and 1 support staff were aware of partnership working with NUS although 1 support staff was only aware of SU working with NUS connected to student fee demonstration. 3 interviewees noted concerns regarding representation on committees. 1 senior manager noted CSU committee membership does give students a voice but this voice is “not student friendly enough or focused to achieve the best outcome for students”. This comment was related to lack of students voting and student engagement with CSU. The other senior manager noted partnership working outlined by QAA adding “may not be

recognised by students themselves although SU may think they have a role” indicating this was not the case at present. Individual representation on academic appeal and malpractice panels was recognised as a partnership by staff members (except support staff at Warrington Campus), this was attributed to personal, professional experiences of either sitting on panels or referring students to CSU and interviewees noted this was a partnership that works well. A senior manager quoted “there is a partnership there (academic appeal and malpractice) which is good” and a member of support staff noted most people would not see CSU and university were separate as this partnership works really well.

Departmental referrals emerged as a theme within interviews. 2 senior managers, 2 support staff and 1 academic staff noted they had referred students to CSU.

5 interviewees were aware of staff/student liaison process (process described in definitions table). Only 2 were aware of CSU involvement. 1 senior manager noted staff/student liaison was just “a label” and there was little knowledge of the actual process.

Conclusions from Question Two

Both senior managers noted partnership working with NUS and QAA as noted in QAA “UK Quality code for HE Part B” and seemed aware of this national agenda for partnership working. However concerns were raised about how effective this partnership is and whether it is recognised by students due to apathy in voting during SU elections and lack of student engagement as reported in Chapter Two in the NUS publication “Surfing the Wave” (2010). Individual representation was noted as being good and a close partnership although an academic staff member noted although they had referred students to CSU they had never received any feedback from CSU and therefore did not recognise this as partnership. QAA note in “Quality Code for Higher Education Part B (2012)” the partnership between SUs and their Universities needs to have “regular communication between partners”. This would not appear to be the case between CSU and departments.

There was also lack of awareness of any involvement in Staff/Student Liaison process. A senior manager noted the process “was just a label” so questioning its effectiveness as a tool for representation, student voice and feedback. NSS was not recognised by interviews in relation to question two although this was noted in literature review on NSS website (<http://thestudentsurvey.com/>) as being the main driving factors behind partnership working within SE.

Question Three: What is your understanding of the Student Experience?

The interviewees were asked what their understanding was of SE in general rather than relating to CSU at this point. The joint NUS and QAA report “The Student Experience Research” (2012) highlighted particular areas within SE; however emerging themes will indicate whether or not these definitions have been understood at a local level.

Chart 5 included facilities/accommodation/catering, academic and placements, social/friends/networks, NSS and Student life cycle

All interviewees recognised facilities/accommodation/catering as being part of SE (3 required prompts - 2 support and 1 academic). All, bar 1 (support staff, Kingsway) noted academic (including study, teaching and learning) was part of SE. 5 interviewees mentioned social/friends/networks (4 support staff and 1 academic staff. 1 support staff mentioned clubs and societies as being a way of finding friends and 1 support staff about CSU having the image of being a “party animal” noting the social side of SE. 4 interviewees mentioned NSS as playing a role within SE. 2 senior managers, 1 support staff and 1 academic staff were aware of NSS. Responses noted NSS may not be helpful as “the questions are a bit vague, loaded and a bit ambiguous, and it’s not clear what they are trying to get at”. A senior manager quoted SE has become “almost a code and not always a helpful term although NSS has tried to break this down”. Whilst considering SE 5 interviewees noted either it was immeasurable or “was every little thing which affected students”. 1 support staff recognised SE as being everything associated with a student’s life at university adding their department “was at the forefront of SE”. Most noted every student is different and are likely to have a different experience they noted these as post graduate students or students on professional courses.

Campus isolation was an emerging theme throughout the interviews. 1 academic staff (Riverside) noted students at Riverside were not getting a good SE. 1 support staff (Warrington) noted students there had a different experience due to types of courses they were on rather than the campus itself (for example professional courses which incorporate placements, have more contact hours and attract mature students).

Conclusions for Question Three

NUS and QAA have worked on a collaborative project to research into SE and areas of teaching and learning having an impact on SE.

Teaching and learning was recognised by interviewees as important in SE and also noted facilities, accommodation, catering as areas. However, SE was noted as “immeasurable and it’s about every little thing affecting each SE even before they come to university”. Only 3 interviewees referred to NSS during interviews although it noted it was that NSS “tries to break down the term SE into categories”. It was noted NSS is unhelpful “the questions are a bit vague, loaded and they are ambiguous”. NSS is the only national feedback mechanism for students to rate their universities on elements of SE and data from this is published in national league tables. NUS is promoting NSS (<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/nss/ref>) for SUs to support and to be used to gauge student opinions within SE. Interviewees noted SE is different for all students but in particular students on professional courses and post graduate students are far less likely to engage with CSU or University therefore having a totally different experience. Campus isolation was noted as a major factor in particular Riverside. NUS and QAA (2012) reports SUs and Universities need to understand barriers that stop students engaging. 5 interviewees (all support staff and 1 academic) mentioned social/friendship networks and indicated friendships rather than social/bar or entertainment. Only 1 mentioned CSU as being a party animal side of SU. This could indicate that staff do not see social/bar entertainment as part of SE.

Question Four: What role does the Student Union have to play in the Student Experience?

When interviewees’ perceptions of SE had been established question four was to explore awareness and perceptions of CSU’s role within SE. Barrow (2012, Oct 31) suggests SUs should be “playing a starring role in student engagement” within SE. The CUC, HEFCE and NUS Supplement “Guide to members of HE Governing Body” confirms SUs should have a “key role in enhancing student experience”.

Chart Seven includes areas of Student Voice/Independent, Social/Friends/Networking, Individual Representation and Representation

6 interviewees (4 support staff and 2 senior managers) noted SU was independent from university and this was a benefit when representing students as they were more likely to speak to peers than a university department. 1 support staff noted being independent gave

SU “more clout” when representing students. 7 interviewees noted the importance of social element and networks within SE. 1 support staff noted “if you stopped someone in the street and mentioned SU the first thing they would think is the bar”. 1 (support staff) talking about bar and social events noted “you will never get away from that image”; another noted “you will always struggle with the argument SU = beer and that’s what students expect. University is about serious stuff and SU is about fun”. 1 senior manager noted “SU is very good at asserting themselves in social areas”.

All support staff had either full or partial awareness of the role of individual representation and representation (overall). 2 senior managers noted representation and student voice whilst an academic member of staff responded to individual representation and representation (overall). 1 senior manager noted CSU “has the ear of the Vice Chancellor which gives them a unique opportunity to influence change” adding “if they choose to do it”. 1 senior manager noted CSU should be co-ordinating representation but expressed concerns about lack of participation and engagement by students within CSU.

Chart eight included clubs and societies, campus isolation, facilities/accommodation/community, Academic and placements, volunteering and employability

5 interviewees were aware of CSU involvement in facilities, accommodation and community. 3 support staff (1 from Kingsway), 1 academic staff and 1 senior manager. 2 support staff and 1 academic staff noted work CSU does with local landlords as part of SE.

Academic and placements was noted as a CSU role in SE. Most interviewees were confused as to CSU’s involvement. 1 senior manager noted “CSU should be gaining opinions of students in areas of teaching and learning” indicating this was not the case at present.

Volunteering and employability were noted as themes (1 academic staff and 2 support staff – 1 prompted). 1 academic staff noted this is an area which CSU could be more involved and could be “a key area in which CSU could play a role” 1 support staff was aware of the volunteering role of CSU and noted “I read about volunteering in the local paper, anyone here (university) will automatically read it”.

Campus isolation was noted again as being a factor within SE. 1 academic staff (Riverside) noted “I don’t think CSU do anything for us”.

Conclusions for Question Four

Senior managers and academic staff quoted CSU could or should be representing students indicating they were not aware of this actually happening. Greatirx (2012) notes the “shift” of SUs from a purely social image and re-establishing themselves in the role of representation and student engagement. Recent national initiatives in conjunction with NUS and QAA as Dobinson (2012, 18th, April) reports universities should be working with their SUs to boost SE. Although interviewees appeared to be aware CSU should be promoting and performing the role of representation it was unclear that this was actually happening. Concerns were raised over lack of participation of students, student engagement with CSU and the effectiveness of CSU representing the student body. Porter (2011, June 6th) notes this apathy in student engaging with their SUs by noting only 12% of students vote in officer elections. All respondents noted the social element of CSU as being the fundamental role SU played in SE. Coakly (2011) stated many SUs are only seen for their “shop window effect”, their high profile functions such as clubs and societies, bars, shops and socials and not recognised for their role of representation as cited in the Education Act 1994 as “being a SU’s core function”. Chapter Two, literature review, notes SUs loss of political status in the 1980’s and the commercial and social activities being more prevalent at this time (Day 2012) which may have contributed to the low profile of representation. All staff recognised the social side of SU and a senior manager noted the main role of CSU as being entertainment. The consequences of SUs not being taken seriously are noted in Chapter Two (Burns 2013, 3rd May). The writer describes events at University of London Union where the University stopped funding, and took control of all services apart from social activities and Sabbatical Officers.

5.4 Overall Conclusions

The research has been based around the question is “What are University of Chester staff perceptions of the role of Chester Students’ Union in relation to the student experience?”

Recent initiatives by NUS and QAA are driving partnership working between SUs and Universities to enhance SE as supported in HEA paper (2013). It was noted in the literature review that the role of a SU may be unclear. This is due to developments in SUs that have taken place over the years as described by Day (2012) and reflected in negative press coverage.

Coakly (2011) stated many SUs are only seen for their “shop window effect”, their high profile functions such as clubs and societies, bars, shops and socials and not recognised for

their role of representation as cited in the Education Act 1994 as “being a SU’s core function”.

The core function of representation was recognised by interviewees as a role SU should or could perform. Greatrix (2012) notes this “shift” of SUs from a purely social image and re-establishing themselves in the role of representation and student engagement. Recent national initiatives in conjunction with NUS and QAA e.g. Dobinson (2012, 18th, April) reports universities should be working with their SUs to boost SE. Barrow (2012, Oct 31) suggests SUs should be “playing a starring role in student engagement” within SE.

Effectiveness of SU representing its students and being viewed as a professional and vital partner within SE was highlighted in the recent report surrounding University of London SU where the University closed the SU and took over this role. Burn, J (2013, 3rd May). During the interview process a senior manager noted the role of representation would be performed anyway by the university even without the involvement of CSU which could raise major concerns for CSU.

Representation was cited generally by interviewees although words such as should or could were used when describing current partnership working and representation. Quotes included “SU should be gaining opinions of students in areas of teaching and learning” and representation as being “a key area in which CSU could play a role” indicating this was not the case at present. This suggests national initiatives cited by Dobinson (2012) in her report “working with SUs to boost student experience” are not being heard at a local level. NUS note the role of SUs within NSS and SUs gauging student opinion and being seen as the student voice (<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/nss/ref>). However, staff were negative about NSS and noted it was ambiguous and not helpful. Concerns here would be that if NUS consider this as a platform to promote SU’s involvement within SE, this lack of commitment could potentially hinder SU’s chances of re-establishing themselves in the role of student voice with their universities within SE.

Interviewees noted SE was impossible to measure although NUS and QAA in “Student Experience full report” (2013) have endeavoured to clarify and define areas of SE. If national definitions are not being translated to staff at a local level and are ambiguous then it will be difficult to reach the shared partnership goals reported by QAA in “UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B” and this will have a negative effect on future partnership working.

NUS and QAA (2012) reports SUs and Universities need to understand barriers that stop students engaging and campus isolation was noted as being major factor adversely affecting SE in particular for CSU and UoC Riverside.

However, interviewees did note the importance of individual representation in CSU's role and this partnership was good. They also noted having independence from University gave CSU more "clout" when representing students.

It appears that although CSU is seen predominantly, by interviewees for its social elements with quotes including "you will never get away from this image (bar and drinking) and "if you stopped someone in the street and mentioned SU the first thing they would think would be the bar", there is still recognition of the core role of representation and with future developments and planning by CSU the possibility of promoting a more positive image and being perceived as a professional partner with UoC.

The impact on future developments within the CSU business plan needs to reflect these issues and will be addressed in recommendations and an implementation plan.

5.5 Limitations

As an experienced interviewer dealing with complex and difficult student issues, the researcher's personal skills enhanced the interview process and a rapport was built with staff members to enable and them to feel at ease during the process. A lack of skill of the researcher whilst conducting interviews can result in limitations during analysis of the findings. As noted earlier, the high volume of data gathering during interviews proved a challenge to manage. However, knowledge of the subject and probing questions or prompts resulted in richer data being unearthed and a rapport between the researcher and interviewee. If these skills are lacking or the researcher is inexperienced in the delivery of interviews then valuable insight or data could be lost which in itself could limit the piece of research. (Shoshanna 17th April, 2012).

The views in this report reflect only the perceptions of the staff interviewed and not the University staff as a whole. At times, a number of staff compared their personal experiences of university rather than reflecting upon current perceptions. Their own university experiences were in the 70's and 80's when as noted previously the SU role was far more political and this may have influenced their impression of the current effectiveness of SU.

5.6 Opportunities for further study

Areas for possible further research emerged during the research process. Interviewees noted that SE is impossible to measure and this could create confusion for SUs and Universities when working in partnership to enhance this experience. The first proposed research area would be:

- How can every SE be measured to allow SUs and Universities improve quality?

Throughout interviews staff on alternative sites to main campus spoke about campus isolation stating that SE on these sites were different from the one on main campus. The second area of interest could be:

- How can Sus and Universities enhance SE on satellite and alternative sites other than the main campus?

Research has shown SU's are still perceived for the social elements they offer to students although there is a shift towards their core function of representation. However is it important to value of social and extra- curricular activities within the SE? The final proposed area for further study is:

- Do social and extra-curricular activities play a fundamental role within SE?

6 Recommendations

Four key recommendations from this piece of research will be reported to CSU in order to inform their strategic planning processes.

Findings suggest the term “student experience” is impossible to measure resulting in confusion and possible lack of direction for CSU and University. NSS was noted as the only tool at present to measure SE and national initiatives recommend SUs and universities work in partnership to enhance this experience. As a result a recommendation would be:

- CSU should work in partnership with university to interpret SE at a local level and jointly consider the roles within the partnership to enhance SE.

Findings suggested that although the role of representation was recognised as a role for a SU and an important element of SE, concerns were raised about the effectiveness of this role. An additional SU officer for academic and representation is being considered at present. Recruiting this dedicated officer will allow more emphasis and time given to promoting and supporting representation including promoting CSU elections and encouraging improved turn-out rates.

A further recommendation would be:

- CSU has to consider its image and promote the professional element of its role to university, in particular individual and overall representation.

Additionally, CSU needs to promote, to students, its independence from University and as a result is the only organisation who can offer unbiased and independent representation.

Campus isolation was a factor for a number of interviewees. The recommendation to improve SE on sites other than main campus would be:

- CSU to become more visible and to deliver a consistent service across all sites.

Engaging students was noted on numerous occasions not only students from alternative sites but part-time, professional and postgraduate students who tend to be less connected to their SU or University.

A recommendation would be:

- CSU to consider alternative ways to engage students who traditionally do not engage (part-time, post graduates, student on professional courses and mature students)

Whilst writing this dissertation steps have already been taken from data collected in interviews to address some recommendations.

For example the Staff/Student Liaison process is being re-designed to promote working in partnership with CSU and SSG to ensure more effective feedback mechanisms for students.

Findings are feeding into CSU strategic planning processes. A CSU planning day has been held to look at areas within SE and how CSU are going to address these.

These four key recommendations are set out in Table Four which identifies each of the actions, timescale and resource implications.

6.1 Summary

Although interviewees were aware of CSU's role of representation this was not viewed as being particularly effective or as the student voice due to lack of engagement by students. It appears the social element of CSU is still regarded as CSU's main role although this was not noted as being part of the overall SE.

National initiatives are being promoted for Universities and SUs to work together to enhance SE. Although there is some awareness of this it still appears there is considerable work to be undertaken at a local level to ensure CSU's role is being viewed as playing a vital role within this. Recommendations have been made to address some of these issues.

Table Four: Implementation Plan

Target	Specific Actions	Timescale	Cost implications
CSU to work in partnership with University to interpret student experience and jointly consider the roles within partnership to enhance the experience.	<p>Staff/Student Liaison Process to continue to be re-designed in partnership with University - actions from these meetings to feed into University Committees.</p> <p>CSU to liaison with University regarding formalising roles within areas of student representation and inclusion of CSU where appropriate</p> <p>University policies and procedures. CSU attend NUS/QAA conferences re student experience alongside university staff.</p>	<p>Designed for Sept 2013 intake of students.</p> <p>On-going process liaising University Senior Management Team and departments.</p> <p>Attendance of approximately 5 conferences per year to gain joint knowledge of national agenda.</p>	<p>New dedicated Sabbatical Officer for Representation and Academic £20K per annum to undertake many of the actions on this plan as part of their role.</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>Many of these conferences have free places – transport and accommodation costs £500 per annum</p>
CSU to consider its image and promote the professional representation element of its role to University	<p>CSU to develop a marketing and advertising strategy to promote the less visible services i.e. representation and individual representation</p> <p>CSU to form a two-way university staff networks to communicate student experience issues.</p> <p>CSU to promote their “independent union representation status”</p> <p>To include CSU branding and logo on all joint ventures with university</p>	<p>Action from CSU business planning taking place in July 2013 and on-going.</p> <p>Key members of university staff to be identified over the summer period and action taken in September 2013.</p> <p>To be included in publicity and marketing materials – on-going.</p> <p>To be included in publicity and marketing materials – on-going Negotiation with University Senior Management Team and relevant departments – Summer 2013</p>	<p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>No further costs implications. Only to be requested when materials are due for re-print</p>

CSU to become more visible on all sites and to deliver a consistent service across all the sites	<p>Further development of CSU website to be promoted as a direct communication link between CSU and students on alternative sites.</p> <p>To identify a network of key members of staff on other sites to develop a communication channel.</p> <p>Surveying students on all sites to gain their views on further provision required.</p>	<p>Website has already been developed further development to dedicate area of the site to alternative sites other than main campus. Launch September 2013</p> <p>Identification over summer 2013 and action in September 2013</p> <p>Survey monkey to be used to survey students – December 2013 to allow new intake of students to be in an informed position to respond.</p>	<p>Further development costs £1500</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p>
CSU to consider alternative ways to engage students who traditionally do not engage (part-time, post graduates and mature students).	<p>CSU to research NUS initiatives to engage these groups of students</p> <p>To ensure these groups of students' are aware of the less visible roles of representation by attending post graduate and part-time inductions.</p> <p>CSU to develop and support a mature student society</p> <p>To ensure that all students are aware of the CSU election process and proposed manifesto's of officers.</p>	<p>Gaining directives from NUS December 2013</p> <p>September and October 2013. Attendance at inductions</p> <p>Launched September 2013 during Fresher's Fair activities</p> <p>January 2014 before elections in February 2014</p>	<p>No further costs implications</p> <p>No further costs implications.</p> <p>New Society costs £150</p> <p>Additional marketing/print costs £500</p>
Total Cost £22,650			

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Appendices

Appendix One	University Committee Membership example
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Appendix One: Example of Committee Membership

Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee: Terms of Reference

On behalf of Senate to:

- 3.1 oversee and uphold the quality and standards of the University's academic provision;
- 3.2 oversee the enhancement of quality and standards, consistency, good practice and innovation in learning, teaching, assessment and the delivery and management of the curriculum (including technology enhanced learning and teaching) with a view to ensuring continuous improvement of the student experience;
- 3.3 oversee preparedness for external quality and standards review and audit at subject, Faculty and University levels; and quality and standards reviews of academic provision and of academic-related services;
- 3.4 promote effective student engagement in developing and enhancing the student learning experience and to oversee the operation of the University's Student Academic Representative and Staff–Student Liaison systems;
- 3.5 develop and promote inclusive policy and practice in relation to enhancement across the University of the experience of students with disabilities and other characteristics which are protected by the Equality Act 2010 and to seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations as required by that Act;
- 3.6 consider and make recommendations for the dissemination of good practice, to address emerging quality and standards issues likely to impact on the University and to monitor action taken on the following, as appropriate:
 - (a) student feedback and survey results;
 - (b) annual reviews and other monitoring reports;
 - (c) student retention, progression and achievement and other key aspects of the student learning experience;
 - (d) information relating to operation of quality assurance and enhancement processes;
 - (e) the operation of the University's collaborative partnerships;
 - (f) information contained in the University's Key Information Sets;
 - (g) reports on academic malpractice and academic appeals;
- 3.7 monitor operation of the University's external examiner system and to approve external examiner nominations from Boards of Study on behalf of Senate;
- 3.8 oversee the submission and approval of Programme Specifications for existing and new academic provision;
- 3.9 in relation to the University's *Principles and Regulations*:
 - (a) oversee consistent and timely implementation;
 - (b) consider and, if appropriate, authorise derogations on behalf of Senate;
 - (c) approve changes to accompanying Handbooks;
 - (d) recommend modifications to Senate;
- 3.10 receive an annual report on the operation of the personal academic tutor system and to advise Senate on the effectiveness of the system;
- 3.11 receive updates to, and monitoring and evaluation reports on, the University's Access Agreement and Widening Participation Strategic Agreement (WPSA);
- 3.12 monitor and advise on strategic risks relevant to the work of the Committee;
- 3.13 make recommendations in respect of the above as appropriate.

Composition

Chair:

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience and Corporate Performance)

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement

Head of Learning and Teaching

One senior member of the full-time academic staff of each Faculty, nominated by the Faculty:

Arts & Media:

Applied Sciences:

Business, Enterprise & Lifelong Learning:

Education & Children's Services:

Health & Social Care:

Humanities:

Social Science:

Dean of Research (or nominee)

Dean of Students (or nominee)

Director of Registry Services

Director of Learning and Information Services

Director of Undergraduate Modular Programmes

Students' Union President *

Students' Union Vice-President (Education and Welfare) *

Chair of Partnerships Sub-committee

In Attendance:

External representative

A representative of the Faculty Administrators' Forum.

Secretary

Ex-officio: The Vice-Chancellor

Observer: Academic Development Adviser: HE in FE

Reporting Relationship

Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee reports directly to Senate.

(*CSU membership)

Appendix Two: STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING OPERATIONAL NOTES FOR STAFF

The University Committee Structure provides a formal framework to gain and act upon feedback from students on issues surrounding the student learning experience, via the Student Academic Representative (SAR) system.

Electing Student Academic Representatives (SARs)

The role of the Student Academic Representatives is to collect feedback from their peers, and to then present feedback to the department at a modular level.

Module Tutors are required to elect or allow the students to elect one student representative for each module within the first 3 weeks of term. In some Departments where there a large number of modules, SARs are elected by level, rather than by module, with reps then giving feedback for several modules. They are advised to discuss this with the SAR Coordinator in Student Support and Guidance, and this is satisfactory as long as all modules are covered effectively. If this is the case this should be communicated to the SAR Coordinator.

Training SARs

When reps are elected, their names, student number, level, module title and code, should be emailed to the SAR Coordinator Darren Mooney (d.mooney@chester.ac.uk), who will invite them to a training session. The training session provides information on:

- Information about the scheme and the role of the SAR
- Confidentiality
- Key transferable skills and body language
- Meeting etiquette
- Gaining and presenting feedback
- Complaints and grievances
- Services provided by Chester Students' Union and Student Support and Guidance
- *
- E-Portfolio / logging experiences
- External examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports

The training strongly focuses on ensuring that the content of the feedback provided, be it on academic or non-academic issues, is appropriate for the meeting.

Allowing SARs to gain feedback

Prior to an SSLM, Tutors are required to give students a few minutes during a session to gain the views and opinions of their group. During this time it would be appropriate for the Tutor to leave the room.

Supporting SARs

SSG and CSU * will hold at least two student rep meetings per year, normally one approximately three weeks into term and one approximately just before Easter. These student led meetings will monitor progress, field questions, and invite Board of Studies (BoS) representatives to receive feedback from other students in their faculty. This will also give an opportunity to appoint Board of Studies representatives if they have not already been identified and give an opportunity to train/refresh SARs. There will be one meeting for each faculty, inviting students from all levels to attend.

Staff-Student Liaison Meetings (SSLM)

Each department will hold two SSLMs per academic year – one in the first half and one in the second half of the year (e.g. November and April).
SARs should be elected within the first three weeks of term.

Meeting format

Please find attached a template for the SSLM agenda. Please adhere to this format, and ensure that the meeting notes record the time, date, venue and attendees of the meeting.

Reporting procedure

All SSLM minutes should be sent to SSG, LIS and SU and the SARs within one month after the meeting, rather than in one batch at the end of the year, this will make the reporting procedure more efficient, allowing actions to be progressed before the next SSLM. Minutes of the SSLM should be sent to all appropriate SARs and displayed on a departmental notice board and website.

*SSG and CSU work in collaboration to take actions up to Learning and Teaching, Student Services and Quality and Standards Committees and any other University Committees, as appropriate. A yearly report is made to Student Services Committee, and the Dean of Students is updated at regular intervals on areas of interest or concern.

Minimum standards for Academic Departments

When reps need to gain feedback, SSLM should be held a minimum of twice per academic year, and it is the responsibility of the department to inform their reps of this meeting.

All SSLM minutes should be sent to Darren Mooney in SSG; the Vice President (Chester) or the Vice President (Warrington), as appropriate,* in Chester Students' Union; and the appropriate member of LIS; and within one month after the meeting, rather than in one batch at the end of the year. This will make the reporting procedure more efficient, allowing actions to be progressed before the next SSLM. Minutes of the SSLM should be sent to all appropriate SARs and displayed on a departmental notice board and on IBIS

External Examiner Reports

SSLMs may receive External Examiner reports. However, External Examiner reports may be shared with students through other means, for example, through the AMR process, use of departmental IBIS space/noticeboards.

Understanding these reports (for example, students will need to understand and acknowledge that is not always feasible, or advisable, that suggestions made by External Examiners departments are implemented) will form part of the training.

Staff are reminded that although external examiners are instructed that they should not identify individual students in their report, this occasionally happens. In this case, reference to the student should be deleted before students see the report.

Annual Monitoring Reports

AMRs may be received at SSLMs as a means of engaging students in the monitoring process. However, AMRs may be shared with students through other means, for example, through the AMR process, use of departmental IBIS space/noticeboards.

***Examples of CSU and university partnership working**

Appendix Three (a) Extract from UoC Complaints Procedure

4. Students who wish to make a complaint ('Complainant(s)') should raise it informally and directly with the staff concerned at the earliest opportunity. This gives the best chance of early and effective resolution. Only where the informal procedure has been completed and the Complainant remains dissatisfied should the formal stage be instituted. Students who feel unable to directly contact the member of staff concerned should seek advice from Student Welfare, Student Support & Guidance (Warrington) or the Students' Union*.

Appendix Three (b) Extract from UoC Disciplinary Procedure

31. A student against whom a complaint has been made shall be entitled to:
 - a. be made fully aware of the disciplinary procedure and of the substance of the allegations;
 - b. be provided, at least 5 working days before any hearing, with a copy of the written evidence to be presented to the hearing. Any written evidence from the student to the Disciplinary Panel should normally be submitted not less than 2 working days before the hearing;
 - c. be present throughout the hearing and to see and hear all the evidence;
 - d. call witnesses to give evidence on her/his behalf at the hearing and to cross-examine any witnesses; and
 - e. be accompanied, assisted or represented at the hearing. This would normally be by a representative or designated officer of the Students' Union*. Representation by a person from any other body should be notified to the Chair of the Formal Disciplinary Panel, in writing, not less than 2 working days before the hearing. Representatives will not be permitted to answer questions on behalf of the student.

*Examples of CSU representing students

Appendix Four: Questionnaire

What do you know about the role of a Students' Union?

Subject	Prompts	No response
Academic Appeals		
Academic Malpractice		
Accommodation		
Bar		
Board of Governors		
Campaigns		
Clubs and Societies		
Committees		
Complaints		
Disciplinaries		
Finance		
Freshers Events		
Freshers Fair		
Inductions		
National Student Rep		
Night Club Deals		
NSS		
NUS Cards		
OIA		
PSP		
Red T Shirt Training		
Representation		
SARs		
Shop		
Starbucks		
Student Demo		
Student Voice		
Welfare		

How does the University and Students' Union work in Partnership?

Subject	Prompts	No response
Academic Appeals		
Academic Malpractice		
Accommodation		
Audits (University)		
Awareness Campaigns		
Committees		
Complaints		
Disciplinaries		
Freshers' Week		
Health for Work		
NSS		
Open Days		
PSP		
Referrals		
Review Panels (University)		
Staff/Student liaison		
Student Engagement		
Student Experience		
Student Rep training		
Student Voice		
Working Groups		
Red T Shirt Training		
Equality/Diversity		

What is your understanding of the “Student Experience”?

Subject	Prompts	No response
Learning and Teaching		
Accommodation/living		
Central Services		
Social		
Volunteering		
Employability		
Part-time Jobs		
Financial		
Organisation and Management		
Learning Resources		
Personal Development		
Placements		

What role does the Students' Union have to play in the
"Student Experience"?

Subject	Prompts	No Response
Learning and Teaching		
Accommodation/Living		
Central Services Liaison		
Social		
Volunteering		
Employability		
Part-time Jobs		
Financial		
Organisation and Management		
Learning Resources		
Personal Development(including welfare)		
Placements		
Representation		
Student Engagement		